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ABSTRACT

Previous research suggests that most Puerto Rican students who have spent some years in the United States and then returned to Puerto Rico generally experience cultural adjustment problems, language difficulties, low self-esteem, and identity crises. This study compared attitudes of Puerto Rican return migrant students (those who have returned to Puerto Rico after living for 3 or more years in the United States) with attitudes of Puerto Rican circulatory migrant students (those who constantly move back and forth between Puerto Rico and the United States) concerning school, teachers, and self-concept in Puerto Rico and in the United States. The Inventario de Percepcion al Ambiente Escolar, an attitude questionnaire, was used to elicit responses from 117 migrant students. The research results indicated that return migrants had more positive feelings toward school, teachers, and self in Puerto Rico than in the United States, while the converse was true of circulatory migrants, who demonstrated more positive attitudes toward school, teachers, and self in the United States. (Author/MJL)

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A Study of the Perception Toward School Teachers and Self of the Return Migrant Student

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Introduction

The number of return migrants of school age has increased dramatically in the last five years. The Department of Education of Puerto Rico (1981) indicates that there are 59,812 return migrant students who have lived for three years or more in the United States.

Underhill (1981) reports that most children of return migrants hate school and actively dislike their teachers. Friedman (1982) reports that return migrants feel a lack of identity; they don't know if they are Americans or Puerto Ricans, and they want to be accepted as both. Pacheco, Lucca, and Wapner (1980) indicate that migration implies a series of drastic changes for the person going from one place to another. They mention that return migrants to Puerto Rico face changes in the physical, social and cultural environment.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to compare the perceptions of return migrant students with circulatory migrants with regard to school, teacher, and self-concept. For the purpose of this study, return migrant students (RMS) are those students who return to Puerto Rico after living for more than three years in the United States. Circulatory migrant students (CMS) are those students who constantly move "to and from" between two places, and it includes more than one return.

Review of the Literature

Zapata (1980) reports return migrants face problems of adjustment such as language and cultural barriers. In an article in the San Juan Star (August 24, 1980), many students expressed the feeling of being lost and wanting to return to the United States, mainly because they did not know Spanish (San Juan Star (April 26, 1982), Friedman reports that return migrants miss

the United States and want to return. Some of the difficulties the return migrants said they had faced in Puerto Rico were boredom, language problems, and initial lack of acceptance.

The number of return migrants to Puerto Rico has been increasing in the last few years. According to Fitzpatrick and Travieso (1981), Puerto Rican migration has changed in character and large numbers of Puerto Ricans are returning to the Island, although the constant flow back and forth continues. Fitzpatrick and Travieso (1981) mention that this constant flow back and forth is most clearly reflected in the transfers in and out of school children; they state that in the 1974-75 school year, 9,254 children transferred from schools in New York to schools in Puerto Rico. According to the Department of Education of Puerto Rico (1981), there are 59,812 students in public schools in Puerto Rico who have lived in the United States for three years or more. This represents 8 percent of the total enrollment in the public schools in Puerto Rico. Table 1 shows the relationship between the total enrollment and the return migrants in the public schools in Puerto Rico with regard to the educational level.

Table 1

Number of Students and Return Migrants
in the Public Schools in Puerto Rico

	Total Enrollment	Return Migrants	Percentage
1979-80			
Elementary Level	408,468	23,012	5
Intermediate Level	178,028	19,614	11
High School Level	129,842	17,186	13
Totals	716,338	59,812	8

According to this data, it can be established that the intermediate (11%) and high school (13%) levels show a larger percentage of students who need help and services to adapt to the schools in Puerto Rico.

According to Carrero, as quoted by Zapata (1980), migration has always created a series of problems in Puerto Rico, especially in public services such as health and education. Carrero states that the return migrant students face language and cultural problems. The Department of Education has offered Bilingual Education Programs as a solution to the linguistic and cultural adjustment problems of those students returning from the mainland. The Bilingual Program also aims to help the students who are potential migrants to the United States. Friedman (1980) reports that there is a need for more bilingual programs in Puerto Rico and that there is a lack of funds and supplementary services.

Ramos Perea (1972) found that return migrants had more adjustment problems in school than non-migrant students. Ramos Perea states that when Puerto Ricans return to the Island, they have to adjust to another social system. Pacheco, Lucca, and Wapner (1980) indicate that return migrants in Puerto Rico have reported an experience of rejection, have demonstrated ambivalence as to their national identity, and have indicated difficulties in understanding and speaking Spanish.

According to the literature (San Juan Star, 1980; Kavestky, 1978; Department of Education, 1981), the return migrant students in Puerto Rico face many problems of adjustment such as language, cultural adjustment difficulties, lack of identity, and low self-esteem. The moblity of migrants requires a closer scrutiny to identify the factor influencing cultural adjustment of the return migrant in the schools in Puerto Rico.

Return Migration

Bovenkerk (1974) describes return migration as the return of people to their country of origin after emigration for the first time. Re-emigration would occur if they went back to the same destination after they had returned to their place of origin. Bovenkerk defines the "to and from" movement between two places which includes more than one return as circulation. Figure 1 presents the various types of migration as visualized by Bovenkerk (1974).

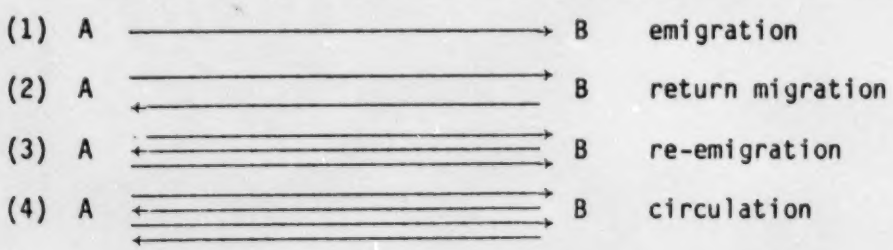

Figure 1. Types of Migration

Kavestky (1978) defines a return migrant as a person born in Puerto Rico and who lived in the United States for a period of five years and returned to the Island. The Department of Education (1981) defines a return migrant as any student enrolled in the schools of Puerto Rico who was born in Puerto Rico, had one or both parents born in Puerto Rico, and was outside the Island for three to eight months.

Bovenkerk (1974) mentions four types of return migrants, which are: (a) intended permanent emigration without return; (b) intended permanent emigration with return; (c) intended temporary migration with return; and (d) intended temporary migration without return. In these types of migration, a factor to consider is the intention of the person migrating, although these intentions are not always clear. According to Carleton (1960), in the late fifties visiting from Puerto Rico to the United States became frequent, and

many persons were to decide later if the purpose of their trip was to migrate or just to visit friends and relatives. Many intended permanent migrations became temporary while other migrations intended to be temporary became permanent. Bovenkerk (1974) states that the ideal of returning is very much alive in many immigrant communities; however he indicates that many authors believe that return migration has its roots in the first phase of adaptation of the immigrants to their new life or in the reaction to discrimination. Adjustment and adaptation to the new culture is an important factor affecting return migration.

Bovenkerk (1974) mentions three factors which will influence return migration. These factors are: (a) the shorter the distance of emigration, the higher the incidence of return migration; (b) the longer the emigrants stay away, the less chance they will return; and (c) changes in the economic balance between the place of origin and the place of destination directly affect the volume of return migration.

The economic motives affect very little the returning of migrants (Gmelch, 1980). Other studies (Appleyard, 1962; Richardson, 1963) indicate that strong family ties and homesickness are the main reasons for returning. Myers and Masnick (1968) found that prospective Puerto Rican return migrants maintained stronger ties with Puerto Rico than those who wanted to stay in New York. Hernandez-Alvarez (1967) found that only one-quarter to one-third of the Puerto Rican return migrants were highly succesful people and the rest were persons of modest social levels who found they could not manage the migration situation.

Problems of Adjustment Among the Puerto Rican Return Migrants

Ramos-Perea (1972) indicates that return migrant students make a poorer adjustment than non-migrant students and they show a lack of confidence and have low self esteem. Ramos-Perea (1972) indicates that the return migrant

has a lower opinion than non-migrants with regard to the organization and internal functioning of the school. Ramos-Perea (1972) also indicates that a poor adjustment was closely associated with high residential mobility, long residence in the United States, low social status, and low ability in Spanish.

Kavestky (1978) indicates that teachers and school officials perceive the return migrants as low achievers, trouble makers, aggressive, undisciplined, disrespectful, lacking an identity, and not knowing either English or Spanish. Underhill (1981) reports, in an article in the San Juan Star (September 20, 1981), that the children of the return migrants are having problems integrating to the Puerto Rican community. Kavestky (1978) mentions the Puerto Rican return migrant as having lower eduational levels than those of earlier years, and, as a whole, they represent the marginal and poorest segments of the urban areas in the United States. Kavestky (1978) also states that the degree of proficiency in English will depend on the time the student has spent in mainland schools, the kinds of schools the student attended, and the ethnic composition of the neighborhood the student lived in on the mainland. Kavestky (1978) also mentions that most of the return migrants speak Spanish of the colloquial and informal kind which they learned during their infancy.

Friedman, as quoted by Kavestky (1978), adds positive characteristics to the return migrant, such as being open, inquisitive, and bright, and they have a high level expectation. They are also capable of combining elements of two cultures in a positive way. Underhill (1981) describes the return migrant as being healthier, receiving less help from the government, and having more friends than people who did not migrate.

Perez-Feliciano, as quoted by Kavestky (1978), reports a better adjustment of senior high school return migrants in Quebradillas, Puerto Rico.

Perez-Feliciano found in his study that return migrants did not feel rejected by their teachers and peer group. One of the recommendations made in the study of Perez-Feliciano was the establishment of therapeutic environment of good will and human understanding in a non-segregated situation where the return migrants can feel that they have at least been accepted as individuals and as Puerto Ricans.

Another source of conflict in the adjustment of the Puerto Rican return migrant is the difference of cultural values of the two settings in which the student has to live. The return migrant students are Puerto Ricans who grew up in an environment with the Anglo-American values. Nogueras and Prewitt (1981) describe this phenomena as student with the same cultural roots but with different cultural patterns.

Summary

Return migrants in Puerto Rico face personal, social, cultural, and linguistic problems when they return to the Island. The Department of Education of Puerto Rico provides limited bilingual programs to help these students learn Spanish and to adapt to the new culture. There is still a need for more bilingual-bicultural programs because the number of returning migrants is constantly increasing.

Various factors, such as a long residence in the United States, a high residential mobility, low social status, and low ability in Spanish, influence the adjustment process of return migrants.

Method

Sample

For the purpose of this study, 117 students were selected from the southern part of Puerto Rico. A total of 81 return migrants; 40 females and 41 males

comprised the control group. The comparison group was composed of 36 circulatory migrant students; 14 females and 22 males. The sample was selected from four different towns from the Ponce Region, which has 7,860 return migrants in its schools (Department of Education, 1981).

Procedure

The Inventario de Percepcion al Ambiente Escolar (Prewitt-Diaz and Seilhamer, 1982) was adminstered to the 117 students selected for this study. The students were asked to answer on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 their perceptions of self-concept, school, and teacher in Puerto Rico and in the United States. The questionnaire provided on one side for the students to answer in relation to the United States and on the other side it referred to the situation in Puerto Rico. The items were not grouped into the different categories or parts, but rather they were mixed together.

Content validity (Nunnally, 1967) for this questionnaire was achieved by presenting the items to five specialists in the area of cultural adjustment who judged each item. The inter-rater reliability of the questionnaire was .87. To ensure correct cross-cultural translations (Brislin, 1980), the items were translated into Spanish by two Puerto Rican bilingual persons. A third bilingual person translated the items into English.

Table 2 presents the statistics source table for the Inventario de Percepcion al Ambiente Escolar which was given to 117 students. The alpha reliabiity coefficient of the inventory was .927.

The questionnaire was divided into four subtests: self-perception, school perception, teacher and language dominance in Puerto Rico and in the United States. For the purpose of this study, language dominance was not assessed.

Table 2

Statistics Source Table for
Inventario de Percepcion al Ambiente Escolar

Source	N	Number of Items	$\bar{X}$	sd	Alpha Reliability
Total Scores	117	80	202.692	30.328	.887
Total Scores for PRGP	36	80	204.111	23.012	.873
Total Scores for RMGP	81	80	202.062	33.045	.927

Findings

The following section provides a discussion of the results. Table 3 presents the source table for t-test for the perception of teachers, self, and school of the non-migrant students. Table 3 yielded significant statistical difference between the perceptions of the circulatory migrants in relation to teachers in Puerto Rico and in the United States ($t=5.680$; $P=<.001$). The difference of perception of the circulatory migrants with regard to self and to schools in the United States and Puerto Rico was also statistically significant ($t=3.226$; $P<.01$).

Table 3

Source Table for t-test for the Variables Perception of Teachers, Perception of Self, Perception of School of the Circulatory Migrant Students

Source	$\bar{X}$	SD	df	t	P
Teacher					
PR	19.69	3.528	34	5.680	.001***
US	34.02	5.779	34		
Self					
PR	20.19	3.964	34	3.226	.01**
US	30.50	6.518	34		
Schools					
PR	19.02	3.299	34	3.126	.01**
US	28.19	5.306	34		

** Significance level at P<.01.
*** Significance level at P<.001.

Table 4 presents the source table for t-test for the perceptions of teachers, self, and school of the return migrants in Puerto Rico and in the United States. Table 4 yielded significant statistical difference between the perceptions of the return migrants in relation to teachers in Puerto Rico and in the United States (t-2.724;P<.01). The difference of perception of the return migrants with regard to schools in the United States and in Puerto Rico is also statistically significant (t=2.740;P<.01). Table 4 yielded significant statistical difference between the perceptions of the return migrants in relation to self in Puerto Rico and in the United States (t=2.477;P<.05).

Table 4

Source Table for t-test for the Variables Perception of Teachers, Perception of Self, Perception of School in the United States and in Puerto Rico of the Return Migrants

Source	$\bar{X}$	sd	df	t	P
Teacher					
PR	32.95	8.201	79	2.724	.01**
US	22.92	5.405	79		
Self					
PR	28.97	7.589	79	2.477	.05*
US	20.08	5.291	79		
Schools					
PR	29.53	6.239	79	2.740	.01**
US	20.38	4.913	79		

* Significance level at $P<.05$.

** Significance level at $P<.01$.

*** Significance level at $P<.001$.

Conclusions

The statistical analysis with the circulator migrant students indicates significant differences in their perceptions of teachers in the United States and in Puerto Rico. Significant differences were also obtained with regards to the perception of self, and with regards to the perception of school. The statistical results yielded significance differences in the variable perception of teachers in the mainland versus Puerto Rico. The return migrants reported a better perception of their teachers in Puerto Rico than in the United States. The return migrant students also reported significant differences in their perception of school and their perception of self in Puerto Rico. It could be that the positive feeling which was exhibited by the return migrant students might be related to the positive attitude which they have developed toward school.

It is important that while return migrant students in this sample expressed a positive feeling towards school, teachers, and self in Puerto Rico, the opposite reaction occurred with the circulatory migrant. The circulatory migrant students perceived school, teachers, and self in the United States to be more positive. This finding should be further analyzed with a larger population of students. This finding is supported by the literature (Fernandez-Cintron and Vales, 1975) in that those who migrate, although they may be successful, return to their place of origin and reinforce their cultural values and ties, thus, at the same time, reinforcing a conceptual construction of migration as a temporary experience.

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